

# TORREYA

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## SOME TREES AND SHRUBS OF ROCKLAND COUNTY\*

BY ELSIE M. KITTREDGE

When the branches of the willows begin to show the "pussies" we are certain the winter will soon be over. I have found lovely pussies in January, but they usually appear in the latter part of February. During the weary days of wind and rain that we know, and dread, as March weather, they are growing, but so slowly we notice no change, until suddenly some sunny morning the last of March we find part of the bushes are a mass of fluffy yellow balls, while the rest bear curious green tassels. We owe much to the willows commercially, but our esthetic debt is large also. Of the native species the pussy willow (*Salix discolor*) is the showiest. The staminate bushes are very attractive for several weeks before flowering, and then for a few days they are glorious. And they give of their beauty bounteously long before the rest of the plant world begins to waken.

Closely following the willows the swamp maples (*Acer rubrum*) burst into bloom, giving promise by their red and yellow fringes of the wonderful wealth of color to come later in the year.

At this time, also, come the tiny flowers of the spice bush (*Benzoin Benzoin*) making a greenish haze through the damp woods and over the swamps. These shrubs are seldom seen outside their native haunts, and because of their early blooming, comparatively few people who know their later appearance have any idea of how they look when in flower. They are desirable for ornamental planting, because of their early blooming,

\* Essay awarded second prize, written by an amateur, on some feature of the vegetation of our local flora range. See TORREYA for March, 1912, and January, 1913.—ED.

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LIER  
NEW  
BOTAN  
GARE

beautiful, aromatic foliage, and lovely scarlet berries, which gleam among the yellowing leaves in September.

Mayday usually finds the shad-bushes (*Amelanchier Botryapium*) in bloom. In the swamps where they abound they remind one of the snows so recently passed, but more often we see but a solitary bush, lightly tossing its white arms and enjoying its brief reign. If the weather is pleasant the flowers may remain several days, but the first shower discourages them, and the petals disappear. I knew one shad-bush years ago that was a large tree, thirty-five or forty feet high. It was a beautiful sight when in full bloom, for it stood on the edge of a dense wood, and the trees back of it made a wonderful background for its white flowers.

From early in May, when their leaves and flowers are unfolding, until the last leaf has fallen, the sassafras bushes and trees are attractive. The flowers are a rather inconspicuous greenish yellow, but the young leaves are olive green, more or less tinged with rusty red, which disappears when the leaves are full grown. In the fall they assume all shades of yellow and red, making a gorgeous display lasting two or three weeks, if the weather is favorable.

Wild cherries abound. *Prunus serotina* is the first to bloom, but the flowers of *P. virginiana* are the prettier. Trees and bushes are a mass of bloom for ten days or two weeks, and every breeze brings the pleasantly bitter fragrance into the house. And in August what a feast they set forth for the birds! Wild canaries, orioles, robins, chippies, and others—by the hundreds they gather in one small tree, and chatter most amiably between mouthfuls.

By the middle of May the pinxter flower (*Azalea nudiflora*) is in bloom. It once clothed many slopes of the Ramapos, but like its cousins, the trailing arbutus and mountain laurel, its beauty is the cause of its destruction. In color the flowers range from pure white to deep crimson and maroon, but these extremes are very rare. The common shades are rosy purple, purplish pink, and almost pure rose pink. There is a marked difference in the shape of the flowers, some bushes bearing flowers

whose lobes are narrow and much recurved, other flowers having lobes almost as broad as they are long, and opening nearly flat. The flowers most commonly found, however, have lobes about half as wide as long, one being less recurved than the others. Young bushes are very symmetrical but after they begin blooming they soon become ragged and misshapen. A bush in full bloom is almost beyond description. The flowers are rich in perfume, and bees are always busy among them. I saw a bush this spring which I am tempted to believe had never before been seen by human eyes—at least not in bloom—and I would not have seen it if I had not heard the hum of the bees. I was “way in the back of beyond,” enjoying earth and sky and trying to be thankful enough for all the beauty around me, when I became conscious of a peculiar sound, which I soon realized was the hum of many bees. “Where bees are flowers are,” I thought. “There must be many bees to make such a noise so there must be many flowers.” On my left were open meadows, full of beautiful things, but nothing to account for the bees. To the right was a dense thicket, extending to the wooded hills beyond, and as I listened the sound seemed to come from the right and a little ahead of me, so I started in that direction, cutting my way through alders, spice bushes, wild cherries and viburnums, all interlaced with cat-brier. My progress was slow and painful, but presently I caught a glimpse of pale pink, like a fluffy cloud resting on the ground. With growing wonder I plied my knife, and edged my way on, until I suddenly came into a little open space, and then I was more than repaid for my toil. The bush was close to ten feet high, I should think, and fully that in its greatest diameter. “Nudiflora” exactly described it, for there were no leaves, and hardly a bit of the twigs could be seen, the flowers were crowded so closely. They were much smaller and paler than those usually found, but it seemed to me they were more fragrant. One gaunt dead branch was mute evidence of the recent hard winter, and I braved the bees long enough to cut it away, then sat down and enjoyed that bush for half an hour. I longed for my camera, yet knew no camera could do justice to its beauty, so I have only a memory of one of the most beautiful things I ever saw.

There are huckleberries and blueberries in great variety all through the meadows and mountains. The high-bush blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*), which blooms in May, is the most striking both in flower and fruit, but it is seldom a fair specimen is found. That species seems to be dying off in this region. One bush that was vigorous and beautiful in bloom three years ago showed a dead branch by the time the fruit was ripe. Next year half the bush was dead and this spring not a flower was to be seen, just a few pale leaves on the topmost twigs of one side.

The flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*) blooms the latter part of May, and is as much sought after as is the pinxter flower. It is one of the most shapely trees when it has plenty of room, but in the woods we more often find a trunk with only one or two branches, than a symmetrical tree. The trees in this region are usually white bracted, but occasionally we find one with pink "petals," as some of us persist in calling them, and sometimes yellowish bracts are found, but I have not seen here the clear lemon yellow bracts I saw in the North Carolina mountains. The pink bracts are noticeably larger than the white, while the yellowish ones are smaller, and the flowers of the pink trees are paler than the type, while those of the yellow trees are usually much darker. Last winter was severe in this region, and the trees and shrubs showed its bitter effects in various ways. I took particular notice of some young dogwood trees I found in an out-of-the-way corner last year, for their branches then were covered with flowers and the bracts were unusually large and very white. This spring they bore very few flowers, and the bracts were small, and streaked and blotched with gray and brown. I also found a tree last year with deep rose-pink bracts—I had never before seen so intense a color in the wild state—and this spring it had only half a dozen clusters of flowers, and the bracts were small and dirty-looking. In full bloom the flowering dogwood is undeniably lovely, but in its autumn dress it is magnificent, its leaves choosing rich crimson, maroon and golden yellow, while its berries glow like rubies. The flowering dogwood is the one tree I have found country people willing to

transplant from the woods into their "yards." Usually they prefer to buy their "ornamental" trees and shrubs from the traveling nursery salesman, and no amount of argument or comparison will convince them that they have, in many instances, paid considerable money for exactly the same things they have growing in their own woods or back pasture. "The man said it was from Japan," and that settles it. But perhaps because they can see "the dogwoods gleaming white" through the darkness of the other trees, they find it acceptable, even if it does "just grow wild."

Four viburnums are common in this region, *V. acerifolium*, *V. dentatum*, *V. Lentago*, and *V. prunifolium*. Branches of what I take to be *V. alnifolium* have been brought to me, but as I have never come across a bush I cannot say it is common. *V. Lentago* and *V. prunifolium* are in bloom by the last of May, but the others are a week or ten days later. *V. prunifolium* forms dense thickets in some places, and when the bushes are in bloom they are worth going to see. The leaves are always beautiful, being more glossy and richer colored than the other species, but in the late fall they are particularly beautiful, turning rich dark red and bronze. *V. Lentago* grows along the neglected back roads and the pasture fences. Its clusters of flowers are larger than *V. prunifolium*, but to me not so attractive. In the fall the foliage is much more brilliant but does not stay on the bushes so long. *V. acerifolium*, the "flowering maple," as it is called here, grows plentifully in the woods. In the open woods the flowers are quite white, but where it is very shady they are a dull pink. Late in September the leaves begin to fall, some turning a dull grayish brown, and quickly falling, others assuming a purplish tinge, and others becoming quite pink in blotches, and lasting a long time, making a beautiful contrast to the almost black fruit. The odor of all the viburnum flowers is unpleasant, but of *V. dentatum* exceedingly so. The cymes of this species vary greatly in size, even on the same bush, some being about six inches in diameter, others not more than two. The leaves remain green until late, then shrivel and fall. Some birds are fond of the fruit, and it is seldom one can find a full cluster after the berries begin to turn.

The white locust (*Robinia Pseudacacia*) is common in this county, sometimes growing to a great height, but usually found as small trees or large bushes along lanes and fences. The flowers appear the last of May, or first of June, and for a week the trees are beautiful, as every little branch bears several racemes of delightfully fragrant flowers. There is a superstition among country people that lightning will not strike a house near which grows either a white locust or a mountain ash. In some localities the latter is known as "lightning tree" because of this belief. The clammy locust (*R. viscosa*) and the moss locust (*R. hispida*) are to be found here, but the latter is not as plentiful as the former, which sometimes forms thickets. They begin to bloom about the time the flowers of the white locust appear, but their season is much longer. Neither is fragrant, partly atoning for that lack by the exquisite tinting of the flowers. The petals of the clammy locust are pale pink, but the calyx is tinged with rich red, thus giving the effect, especially from a little distance, of rather deep pink flowers. The flowers of the moss locust are rosy purple, very beautiful indeed, in contrast with the pale green stems beset with dark red hairs, and the deep green leaves.

Mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*) used to cover the hills, and is still abundant in certain localities, but in a few years we may count ourselves fortunate to come across one bush, where now there are hundreds. Laurel is not only extensively gathered when in bloom, but because of its beautiful evergreen leaves, is much sought after for Christmas decorations. And then people are utterly at a loss to understand why there are no flowers the next year, "when we found *quantities* here last June!" There is a large estate not far from here, whose owner has gone to much trouble and expense to make a laurel plantation. For several weeks of the summer, and again in the winter, I am told he keeps fierce dogs in the grounds, and his men are armed with guns, in order to keep away the hordes of people who think because the bushes are native, they are at liberty to help themselves. In the higher hills the laurel bushes grow quite tall, but the usual height is from three to five feet. The flowers vary greatly in size, some being a little over an inch in diameter when fully

expanded, others not much over half an inch. Some are pure glistening white, except for the ruby ring; others are pale pink, and others deep rich pink.

The tulip tree (*Liriodendron Tulipifera*), of which we have many noble specimens, comes into bloom about the middle of June. The beautiful cups of pale yellow and orange, resting lightly on the ends of the small branches, are not easily seen, because of the wealth of leaves fluttering in the slightest breeze, but when branches are placed in convenient jars the effect is wonderful. The flowers, at least when in the house, exude a clear sticky fluid, almost as adhesive as glue.

The paniced dogwood (*Cornus candidissima*) and the kinnikinnik (*C. Amomum*) bloom the latter part of June. The former is to be found in quantities in many fields, and edging the deep woods, and its feathery clusters of flowers are very dainty. In September the leaves assume a reddish tinge, thus displaying the clusters of white berries to the best advantage. The kinnikinnik grows in the swamps, and attracts little attention when in bloom, as the greenish white flowers are in small clusters, but later in the year the beautiful blue berries, nestling among the green leaves, are wonderfully attractive.

Not to speak of the elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*) would be a crime, since it is so common, the flowers so beautiful, and the fruit so desirable. Almost every fence corner in the "back districts" has a clump of elders, and in some of the swamps there are hundreds of bushes. The large cymes of white flowers are so sprightly, one wonders at the somewhat lackadaisical appearance in the bush when not in flower. The leaves seem to droop, and the branches are greatly bent late in the summer from the weight of the drooping clusters of berries, heavy with the rich crimson juice, beloved of country housewives for wine for the sick room. It has been often remarked that if this way-side bush were an importation from over seas we would rave of the wonderful beauty of its flowers, whereas now little or no attention is paid to it, except when the fruit is ripe.

The swamp azalea (*Azalea viscosa*) is to be found in many of our swamps, blooming the latter part of June and during July.

The size of the flowers varies greatly on neighboring bushes, also the richness of perfume, some bushes bearing flowers nearly two inches long, exceedingly fragrant, while on other bushes the flowers are not much over an inch long and have little fragrance. The flowers are usually pure white, but on one bush that I know a faint pink is to be seen on the buds.

For a few days early in July our hills are drifted over with the feathery white blooms of the New Jersey tea (*Ceanothus americanus*). I am told that in the "back districts" country people still make use of the leaves as a substitute for tea, as the loyal colonists did in Revolutionary times.

Happily, wild roses grow almost everywhere, and put forth their blossoms in profusion. The pasture rose (*Rosa humilis*) and the swamp rose (*R. carolina*) are the most common here, and bloom all through July and well into August. Occasionally new shoots will bloom late in September, and I have found a few in October, after several frosts. These later blooms seem always more fragrant and beautiful than those which appear in the regular season, and are graciously pleased to remain fresh and lovely for a couple of days in the house.

Late in July the swamps and wet woods are made most attractive by the beautiful and fragrant white alder (*Clethra alnifolia*) and button-bush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*). Unfortunately the first shower spoils the beauty of the button-bush, turning all the tiny flowers brown, but after the flowers are all gone the bush is again interesting, with its dark green leaves veined with red, and the curious balls of seeds. The white alder has a longer blooming season, sometimes lasting into September, and is one of the accommodating bushes, permitting its flowers to remain fresh and sweet for several days in the house.

During September and the first part of October, the bushes and trees that delighted us with beautiful flowers earlier in the year enchant us with the wonderful coloring of their leaves and fruit, so we cannot mourn the flowers. All the dogwoods and viburnums show marvellous combinations and blendings of reds and yellows and blues. And now the sumacs, to which we have paid no attention during the summer, flame from every field and



swamp. The first to turn is the smooth sumac (*Rhus glabra*). The mountain sumac (*R. copallina*) usually keeps its rich dark green color much later than the others, and when it does turn, shows more crimson than scarlet. But the poison sumac (*R. vernix*) is the most gorgeous of all, which is a great pity, for the lure of its wonderful leaves causes much suffering to most of those who touch them. Several years ago one of the country churches was elaborately decorated with it. Although a stranger, I told some of the people the bush was dangerous but was met by smiling assurances that I was mistaken, and they kindly pointed to the mountain sumac as the one to avoid. I never heard the results of that decoration, but suppose if any were affected, they attributed their discomfort to some other cause. Of the large trees the sassafras and the various maples claim most attention because of their vivid colors. Some of the swamp maples turn very early, others remain green until October, so the swamps are ablaze in spots for several weeks. The berries of the black alder (*Ilex verticillata*) make the swamps gay after the leaves have fallen. Gathered late in October, and kept in a cool place, not too dry, these berries will remain fresh and brilliant and add much to the beauty of holiday decoration.

Presently trees and shrubs are stripped of "their wealth of gold and crimson" and they compose themselves to rest. Then on a quiet day late in October, when everything seems dead, we come suddenly upon the witch hazels (*Hamamelis virginiana*) in full bloom! The bare branches are covered with curious lemon-scented yellow flowers,—for all the world like tiny wisps of crinkly yellow tissue paper, scattered over a dead bush. The gathering of the branches is attended with some little discomfort, for we cannot avoid touching the ripe capsules, and the seeds fly in every direction, sharply stinging cheeks already tingling from the frosty air.

#### SHORTER NOTES

PROLIFICATION OF THE FRUIT IN OKRA, HIBISCUS ESCULENTUS.  
—Among the various phenomena included by teratologists under